

## Grantees honored for breast cancer risk communication

By Eddy Ball

Three members of the NIH-funded Michigan State University (MSU) Breast Cancer and the Environment Research Program (BCERP) are winners of the 2013 [International Communication Association \(ICA\)](http://www.icahdq.org/) (<http://www.icahdq.org/>) Applied Research Award. Lead researcher Charles Atkin, Ph.D., and co-researchers Sandi Smith, Ph.D., and Kami Silk, Ph.D., shared honors for their applied communication accomplishments, translating emerging environmental health science research findings into the reduction of breast cancer risk among women of all ages, at every level of society.

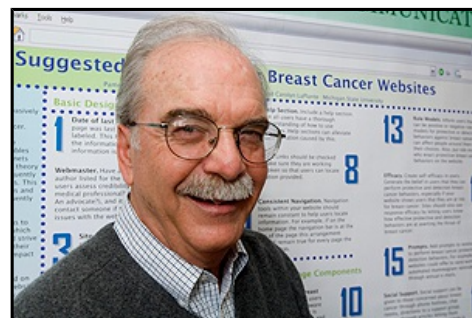
In its announcement of the award, the international nominating committee praised the MSU researchers for their public health impact. "Their research is highly productive in several important senses, with an integrative character that embraces multiple scientific disciplines, associated practitioners, and relevant political leaders."

### Public health impact

"The public visibility of the project correlates with its capacity to get public funding and refunding," the members wrote. "The committee therefore celebrates the research program of Atkin, Smith, and Silk to be a true model for applied communication research, with expansive intellectual and practical impacts."

Smith and Silk will accept the team's award June 18, during an awards banquet at the ICA 63rd annual conference in London. Atkin, chairman of the MSU Department of Communication, who died in August 2012, will be remembered June 20 at a special session of the conference, "In Memoriam: The Legacy of Charles K. Atkin."

"This award is a tribute to Chuck and his team, and a well-deserved recognition of our program's commitment to prevention of breast cancer," said NIEHS program director Les Reinlib, Ph.D., who administers the [BCERP](#) grants portfolio. "Environment has a clear role in breast cancer and a key to preventing it. Communicating with girls and women to understand their perceptions, and send practical messages on avoiding exposure to reduce risk, is the best medicine."



*In light of Atkin's death last year, "It is somewhat bittersweet," wrote Richard Schwartz, Ph.D., in the university's announcement of the award. Schwartz is associate dean for graduate academic and student affairs for the College of Natural Science at MSU. (Photo courtesy of MSU)*



*Smith is director of the Health and Risk Communication Center and a professor in the Department of Communication at MSU. (Photo courtesy of MSU)*

## The MSU Community Outreach and Translation Core (COTC)

The [MSU COTC](http://www.bcerc.msu.edu/communication.html) (<http://www.bcerc.msu.edu/communication.html>) is comprised of community advocates and faculty members from the Department of Communication, working together to increase awareness about breast cancer, based on state-of-the-science evidence. “We need to help women and children of all ages and backgrounds, to not only access breast cancer information, but to also understand and act on it,” Atkin wrote of the team’s mission.

Among its efforts is an educational and fundraising program known as Meal Patterning for Breast Health, which was organized and implemented by community advocates in coalition with other university and community sponsors. The team has also conducted ten focus groups across four counties in Michigan, to gain an understanding of adolescent and adult female perceptions and understanding of breast cancer and the environment.

COTC staff members are currently piloting a random phone survey across Michigan, to further formative research. This information will help in developing tailored health messages to target various audiences, particularly adolescent females. Looking to the future, MSU has a project website under construction that will explain BCERP activities, as well as provide another source for breast cancer information.

According to organization President [Cynthia Stohl, Ph.D.](http://www.comm.ucsb.edu/people/academic/cynthia-stohl), (<http://www.comm.ucsb.edu/people/academic/cynthia-stohl>) ICA, which began more than 60 years ago in the U.S., has evolved into a leading international academic association with more than 4,300 members in 80 countries. Since 2003, ICA has been officially associated with the United Nations, as a nongovernmental organization.



*Silk is an associate professor in the Department of Communication and the director of the Master's Program in Health and Risk Communication at MSU. (Photo courtesy of MSU)*

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